Gangs Project Gang-Proof

Helping Families Protect Children from Gangs

This information is part of the Project Gang-Proof initiative and is for everyone who is involved in caring for children.

The makeup of families has changed considerably over the years. Today, children may live with parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, guardians or other caretakers. For the purpose of this fact sheet, the word "parent" means any adult who is caring for a child.

Ces renseignements sont également offerts en français.

Warning Signs and Prevention Tips for Parents and Families

Gang Involvement – *Is it an issue for your family?*

Boys and girls getting involved in street gangs and other criminal activities is a serious problem. It can have devastating effects on families, schools and communities. Joining a gang can lead to other dangers like drugs, violence and coming into contact with the justice system.

To help you determine if your child is involved in a gang, here are some signs to watch for.

Warning signs of gang involvement

- changes in appearance (ex: shows a new interest in wearing one or two specific colours of clothing)
- odd pen marks, unexplained injuries, bruises or burns on arms, hands and body
- gets a tattoo
- starts using hand signs
- money becomes a priority – your child asks for money more often, steals money or has more money than usual
- has unexplained gifts (ex: cell phone)
- carries a weapon (ex: knife, brass knuckles, etc.)
- changes in friends, interests and activities (ex: stays out too late or all night, doesn't introduce new friends)
- skips school
- becomes more secretive
- draws graffiti symbols and unfamiliar names on books, folders or bedroom walls
- shows signs of drug or alcohol use
- displays pro-gang attitudes (ex: starts to like gangster movies, violent videos, music, etc.)

***Please note:** Some changes, such as being secretive, can simply be a part of typical child development. Other actions, such as carrying a weapon, are not typical and should raise immediate concerns.*

Manitoba

Prevent your child from joining a gang

attraction

Children get involved in gangs for a number of reasons. Often they will join a gang to feel like they belong or fit in. They may not feel that sense of belonging at home or at school. Others feel scared in their neighbourhood, and believe that joining a gang will protect them. For some young people the need or desire for money can be hard to turn down.

young

If you have young children, start preparing your family to be gang-proof. That means talking about gangs and how they hurt children, families and communities.

You

Most parents know the dangers of joining a gang, but don't know how to talk to their kids about it. They may feel their words won't have any impact on the child's behaviour. The truth is, though they may not appear to be listening, children do hear what parents say. And parents can influence how their children behave and the choices they make.

If you think your child may be involved in gang activity, you need to be more aware than ever before. Be nosy, if that's what it takes to get information. Remember, your child could be in danger.

PREVENTION TIPS!

Here are some tips for parents on preventing children from joining a gang:

1. Seek help for your child or teen

If your child makes a bad choice and is in trouble, don't hesitate to ask for help. Contact your local community agency, Friendship Centre, school or government office to see if they offer support programs for parents and families.

Talk to someone you trust about your child's situation – it could be a friend, spiritual advisor, elder or teacher. Ask that person to talk to your child. Developing a positive connection to a trusted person can build your children's self-esteem and help them make positive choices.

2. Find parenting supports

All parents can use help. There are resources in many communities that offer parenting classes (ex: community agency, parent-child coalition, Friendship Centre, family resource centre). Cultural-based programs can also be very helpful to some parents and families. Ask your local school or community centre if they know where a local parent support class is offered.

3. Stay connected to your child

Spend time with your child (ex: play games, tell stories, look at books, go for a walk). Get to know your child's friends and their families.

Know where your kids are at all times. Make sure they're not on the streets or in the community alone. If they start hanging around with kids who are a bad influence, help them make new friends.

Let your kids know you love them. Tell them positive things and listen to what they have to say. Children with a strong connection to a parent or family member are less likely to look for support and a sense of belonging from gangs.

4. Spend time at your child's school

Children typically spend more time at school than at home. Stay connected to the school. Get to know your child's teacher and other staff members. If you can, volunteer at the school. Walk your children to school or make sure they walk with a friend. Do homework together. If your child is having trouble at school, talk to your child, teachers and school counsellor. If the problem continues, speak to the principal.

5. Encourage positive activities

Help your child get involved in activities after school and on weekends. There are many community centres, Friendship Centres, Boys and Girls Clubs and other resources throughout Manitoba that offer free recreation programs. Contact your local community centre, school or Band Office to ask about recreation programs in your area.

The province has many Lighthouses throughout Manitoba. Lighthouses is a youth program that offers free recreational opportunities and a positive alternative to gangs or other criminal activities. For a list of Lighthouses sites, please call:
Winnipeg: 945-1549 or 945-6769
Manitoba: toll free 1-866-626-4862 ext. 1549 or 6769
Website: www.gov.mb.ca/justice/lighthouses/index.html

6. Talk to your child about gangs

Explain to your children how dangerous gangs are. Let your child know that gangs can not only hurt them – they can also hurt other family members. Tell your child not to hang out with gang members, go to parties organized by gangs, use hand signals or wear gang clothing.

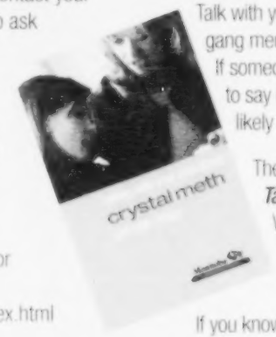
7. Be a positive role model and mentor

Set a positive example for your child. Positive role models can have a major impact on what children think and how they behave. Is there a person in your neighbourhood that your child trusts and looks up to who could be a mentor? Positive role models and mentors can include parents, teachers, advisors or other trusted adults who care about your child.

Cultural programs are also a great support for some children. Check with your local Friendship Centre, Big Brothers and Big Sisters organization, community centres, schools and other local groups to ask about cultural programs in your area.

8. Talk to your child about drug abuse

Talk with your children about the dangers of drugs. Teach them that gang members use drugs to try and lure children into their gangs. If someone is pressuring them to try drugs, teach your children to say no. Kids whose parents talk to them about drugs are less likely to begin using them.



The Manitoba government has produced a handbook called *Talking to your Kids about Crystal Meth and Other Drugs*
Visit www.gov.mb.ca/crystalmeth/index.html to view the handbook, or call toll free 1-866-626-4862 to receive copy.

If you know your child is taking drugs, seek help. Talk to your child and let them know you are concerned. For a list of addiction programs, visit our Healthy Living website: www.gov.mb.ca/health/mh/links.html#addictions. Or call:

Addictions Foundation of Manitoba	1-866-638-2568 (Winnipeg) 1-866-767-3838 (Brandon) 1-866-291-7774 (Thompson)
The Salvation Army	946-9400 (Winnipeg)
Behavioural Health Foundation	269-3430 (St. Norbert)
Native Addictions	536-8395 (Winnipeg)

Prevent your child from joining a gang

Gangs – What is the **attraction**?

Children get involved in gangs for a number of reasons. Often they will join a gang to look like they belong or fit in. They may not find their sense of belonging at home or at school. Others are scared in their neighbourhood and believe that joining a gang will protect them. For some young people the need or desire for money can be hard to turn down.

Start while they're **young**

If you have young children, start preventing your family to be gang-smart. That means talking about gangs and how they hurt children, families and communities.

You can make a difference

Most parents know the dangers of joining a gang, but don't know how to talk to their kids about it. They may feel their words won't have any impact on the child's behaviour. The truth is, though they may not appear to be listening, children do hear what parents say. And parents can influence how their children behave and the choices they make.

If you think your child may be involved in gang activity, you need to be more aware than ever before. Be wary. If that's what it takes to get information. Remember, your child could be in danger.

commitment

Manitoba has taken strong, decisive actions on its own and in partnership with community groups to address gangs. Gangs can form in all types of neighbourhoods, and across all cultures and ethnic groups. However, families and children who may be more vulnerable to criminal activity or being lured into gangs often face many challenges, such as poverty, unemployment, or poor housing. While working on long-term solutions to improve our communities, this fact sheet provides some immediate steps parents, caregivers, families and communities can take to prevent children from becoming involved in gangs.

The provincial government has developed a comprehensive, co-ordinated response that focuses on dealing with gang issues and creating positive alternatives for Manitoba youth. These initiatives are enhanced by crime prevention programs, educational opportunities and community and economic development initiatives which help address social and economic challenges.

Kids *helping* kids

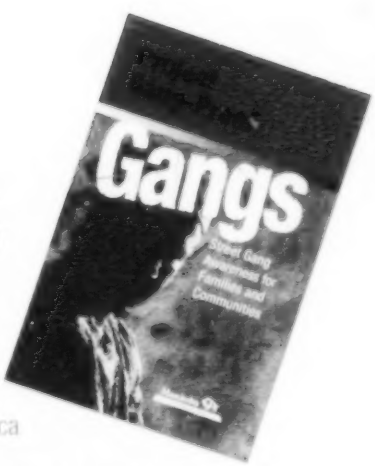
Manitoba youth *speaking out* against gang involvement

One hundred youth at the Manitoba Youth Centre were asked to share how things might have been different if they had known about other choices or had more support.

They said the following things may have helped them avoid gangs:

- if parents had taken classes to improve their parenting skills
- access to alternative school programs
- access to employment training programs
- opportunities to play organized sports, or participate in free activities (ex: soccer, swimming, etc.)
- availability of positive role models
- encouragement to attend alcohol and addiction programs
- transportation to school, work, recreation programs, etc.

Do you need more information?



To get a copy of *Project Gang-Proof: Street Gang Awareness for Families and Communities* contact:

Manitoba Justice
Community Justice Branch
1-800-691-4264
E-mail: crimeprevention@gov.mb.ca

To view the Project Gang-Proof handbook on-line, visit:
www.gov.mb.ca/justice/safe/gangproof/index.html

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